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ABSTRACT

This address examines the personal experiences and attitudes of a language teacher during the 1960's, exploring the then commonly held notions of "creativity" with a view toward stimulating professional reappraisal of the term and its pedagogical implications. The author suggests that the notion of the teacher "guiding creativity" must yield to a "creativity unleashed" before the student will play a meaningful, participatory role in the creative process. Several recommendations are offered which are intended to facilitate the achievement of creativity in the classroom. (RL)

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IS CREATIVITY IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER?

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The keynoter's role is not unlike that of the cheerleader. Both have to get up and try to arouse enthusiasm for the "team" without knowing how the "team" is really going to perform--in the game or in the conference. And so, in many respects, I stand here before you today as the world's oldest living active cheerleader for foreign languages--performing another act of faith as to how the team is going to perform when the whistle blows.

Much of what I am going to say is intensely and odiously personal. An appropriate subtitle for this presentation might well be "One Woman's Odyssey In, About, and Through Creativity," for I am the "beholder" of the title. I do not propose to establish any absolutes; like John Bockman, I am convinced that we shall never have absolutes again. I propose only to examine the immediate "creative" past of one foreign-language teacher and to explore the spectrum of opportunities for creativity developing for foreign-language teachers today and tomorrow.

In the "good old days," when I began "keeping" school, teachers, like the Sun King of yore or the "Little Father of All the Russias," were absolute rulers over their students. The teacher, in effect, "created" the classroom; everything that transpired in my room happened by teacher decision, through teacher benevolence, and under teacher aegis. I stood in the center of my universe, ordered by my seating chart, and decreed what could happen there. Not only did I "create" the content, the teaching methods, and the measures of achievement, but, more often than not, although I am grossly embarrassed to admit it,

I created an aristocracy and was solcely responsible for determining what members of my already elite corps might flourish. I was an absolutist-teacher controlling my students absolutely, for I also controlled their passage down the corridor--and to the toilet, and I at least cooperated in controlling the length of their hair--and of their skirts. In brief, I controlled the student's worth; in a large measure, my students were valuable only in so far as they were like or approaching likeness to me--I created in my own image. And I measured off the time allotted for their learning to be just like me by the clock and the calendar.

In those days I had three stock phrases: "That's good!" (You're very much like me); "That's not good enough!" (You're not like me at all); and, "Think for yourself!" (Think like me). I could have been Lucy in this segment from Charles M. Schulz's PEANUTS, for Lucy is often absolutist-teacher personified:

Lucy: You got a "C" in German? That's only average!

Linus: So what? I'm an average student in an average school in an average community....What's wrong with being average?

Lucy: Because you're capable of doing better.

Linus: That's the average answer!*

So, in that classroom I created in the early fifties, when my student protested to his teacher, "I'm me and I have worth as I am," his teacher's reply was, "That's simply not good enough."

While I was busily creating better grammar and translation devices for weeding out the students who were simply not good enough, that is, not enough like me, I was teaching a grammar-translation approach. We drilled vocabulary lists, wrote vocabulary quizzes, studied paradigms, conjugated and declined, translated ad nauseam, and parsed and parsed and parsed.

And because creative prowess cannot be concealed, my creative potential surfaced one day while my third-year Latin class was parsing one of Cicero's

* I have taken liberties in replacing the discipline in this quotation. In the original, it was history.

lengthier utterances against Catiline. I FELL ASLEEP IN A CLASS I WAS TEACHING! Anyone, of course, can put his students to sleep, but my instruction was so mentally stimulating that I dropped off myself while a student was slowly--very slowly--accounting for every single element in the third or fourth clause. All I can say in my own defense is that the mass of the class had preceded me into the land of Nod by at least a clause or two!

It was about this time that I joined eighty other teachers from the country to learn that, three years after graduation, I was on the verge of becoming obsolete. We spent a summer at the University of Minnesota at the Ford sponsored Foreign Language Auxilium learning the aural-oral approach which was to become audiolingualism because no one could say "aural-oral" with near-native pronunciation and intonation.

Thus, in the mid fifties, I ceased concentrating my creative faculties on being a model of mental discipline and trained them on becoming a language model. Where I had once spent my time inventing original grammar and reading practices, I now devoted my spare moments to the production of visual aids and taped materials for oral drill. (No little of my creative energies, of course, was being expended on increasing my own oral proficiency.)

When I returned to my school system to create my own personal aural-oral aura, I found that my departmental colleagues were eager to foster my youthful exuberance. Teacher X thought that the plans I had were marvelous--so long as my course continued to meet the next year's syllabus and prepared students to perform in the sequence as it had always existed. Teacher Y was thrilled, really thrilled by my instructional layout, but she did evidence some concern as to the students' mastery of verbs--if they knew all six tenses, active and passive, of all the conjugations, all would be fine. Both teachers X and Y hoped that the aural-oral procedures would still prepare our students to read these four authors. If I had been a painter, they would have told me to paint to my heart's content--using the colors brown and purple; if I had been a cook, they would have told me that I might season with only chili powder--but heaven knows that all of us "professionals" encourage creativity!

For personal (personality?) reasons, audiolingualism was much more "my thing" than the grammar-translation approach, but, despite my visuals and tapes, I was not all that much less absolutist. I still ordered my universe with a seating chart, albeit now semicircles rather than six rows of five seats each--the rectangle. I still regulated the length of hair and of skirts, and the passage down the corridor; the major difference was that I now expressed my control in the target language rather than in English. While I taught the grammar-translation approach, my concerns had always been with enrollments; during my audiolingual period it was not too heady to speak seriously of the four-, six-, and nine-year sequence.

In the early sixties, as the aural-oral approach became audiolingualism, I was so dynamic and energetic in the classroom that I was made head cheerleader sponsor. (In that school even the sponsors came in squads.) One of the myriad (and sequential) Friday nights I spent at the football oval, I was passed a note that a Pepper was smoking--under the bleachers--and in uniform! Now, I must confess that I have never really known precisely what the procedures were to be; was I supposed to rip the emblem off her sweater and divest her of her beanie there under the bleachers in the dark or was there some constitutional ceremony spelled out somewhere? In any event, I hit the cinder track running--until my heel ground into the cinders and I fell. AT THAT MOMENT I BECAME BOTH THE HALFTIME ENTERTAINMENT AND THE ONLY INJURY OF THE GAME. The team doctor came off the bench to determine that I had, indeed, broken my foot. An ambulance was summoned--at funereal pace--around the cinder track--to pick up the foundered pep club sponsor. The intercom then reported that due to the long delay of the game the band would not march. Throughout the long delay of the game, Dick Cavett's father, who was a colleague of mine at the time, held my hand and gave me words of comfort like, "Smile! Five thousand people are watching you." When I returned to the school in my brand new "suit" of crutches the following Monday, my classroom had been moved from third to first floor and the new room sported a banner "Foreign Language Recovery Room." My efforts at creative teaching had focused the whole school's attention on foreign languages!

At this stage in my odyssey toward creative teaching, I came off the crutches in time to enter an academic year NDEA institute in Russian. I wanted to be

"really" trained in audiolingualism and I wanted to learn language audio-lingually. The institute, however, confronted its participants with a paradox which considerably slowed our creative juices; our classes were quite apart from the rest of the students in the "regular" department and our teachers taught us by methods and with materials they did not then use (and have never utilized since) anywhere but with the NDEA students. Even the teacher-training candidates were not being taught in the same ways or to do the same things we were being retrained to do. The university staff members, by and large, remained unchanged by its series of NDEA institutes; there was no "leakage" of teaching approach into the rest of the department. When the NDEA institutes ceased, the professors put aside these methods and this philosophy.

Creative audiolingualism was thwarted by the institute tendency to strip many of its participants of their self-concepts. The NDEAers had their language competence assailed, their teaching methods attacked, and their knowledge of the culture derided; in return for their losses, they received instruction for eight weeks or so of the first level's prereading period. My own department chairman, one of the finest foreign-language teachers I have ever seen in action, who regularly taught her students to speak French although she was not fluent in the language, and whose students had superb pronunciation and intonation because she had come to grips very realistically with her own deficiencies, returned from institute training so demoralized that it took her nearly two years to return to the superb audiolingual instruction she had offered her students long before there was an NDEA.

Later in the sixties, I was to work in NDEA institutes. There the final paradox of that phenomenon confronted me--the last NDEA institutes bore no substantive differences from the first ones. It appeared that audiolingualism could not be my teaching "home;" the purpose of the NDEA offerings was replication and duplication rather than development or evolution--creativity, if you will. And in the mid sixties it became evident that both change itself and students were changing, although NDEA institutes and foreign-language departments were not.

Up until 1965 or so, I, like Evgeni Zamyatin's "live-dead," had been able to

confine myself to asking the "answered" questions. It was the student's responsibility to learn the teacher's answers to the questions in the absolute classroom. But when activity, much less creativity, came to a seeming halt in the mid sixties, when we all seemed to be marching in place, real-life thinking began to challenge teacher thinking. And the results of such confrontations were exceedingly strange, whether in the NDEA context when teachers tried to translate what they learned into the "real world" of the school, or in the college-requirement arena where students tried to tell us that our claims for the benefits of what we were requiring of them were simply not true. Perhaps another example from PEANUTS will illustrate what happened.

Lucy: "When she saw the little house in the woods, she wondered who lived there so she knocked at the door. No one answered so she knocked again." What do you think will happen?

Linus: I can't imagine.

Lucy: "...Still no one answered, so Goldilocks opened the door and walked in. There before her, in the little room, she saw a table set for three...There was a great big bowl of porridge, a middle-sized bowl of porridge, and a little, wee bowl of porridge. She tasted the great big bowl of porridge...

'Oh, this is too hot,' she said. Then she tasted the middle-sized bowl of porridge. 'Oh, this is too cold.' Then she tasted the little, wee bowl. 'Oh, this is just right,' she said, and she ate it all up."

Linus: I have a question!

Lucy: About what?

Linus: Well, it's in regard to cooling...It would seem to me that if the middle-sized bowl was cold, the little wee bowl would be cold, too, rather than 'just right,' and....

POW!

I never even brought up the far more obvious point of illegal entry!

Teachers like me--and I--had to rethink the direction of our creative efforts when confronted by comments like this seventeen-year-old girl's:

It seems as if there's nothing for us to do but say, oh hell, all right. The curriculum planners, the publishers, the packagers, the administrators, and the teachers have the courses all mapped out. Our own teacher is so gung ho that he has a whole lot more of his own that we get. You get the feeling that there's nothing left that can be ours, nothing for us to do but chew it all and swallow it, and then say, "I did it. What now?"

David Mallery reports this girl's feelings in The School and the Democratic Environment.

When we heeded the real-world intrusions and attempted to create new instructional modes, we still had our hang-ups--as per Charles Silberman's description of the Random Access System in a New England school.

A high school in a New England city is very proud of its elaborately equipped language laboratory, with a new "Random Access Teaching Equipment" system touted as "tailored to the individual student's progress, as each position permits the instructor to gauge the progress of all students on an individual basis." To make sure that its expensive equipment is used properly, the high school gives students careful instructions, among them the following:

** No one is an individual in the laboratory. Do nothing and touch nothing until instructions are given by the teacher. Then listen carefully and follow directions exactly.

** The equipment in the laboratory is not like ordinary tape recorders. The principles involved are quite different. Please do not ask unnecessary questions about its operation.

** You will stand quietly behind the chair at your booth until the teacher asks you to sit. Then sit in as close to the desk as possible.

The instructions for the lab assistants are equally explicit. They include the following:

1. Keep watching the students all the time.

- a) By standing in the middle of the lab on the window side you can see most of the lab.
- b) Walk along the rows to make sure that all arms are folded: politely but firmly ask the students to do this.

Nothing about this "access" is "random." Teachers like me--and I--have always been uncomfortable as students in situations like this one; in the mid to late sixties, however, we finally became uncomfortable as teachers creating learning environments like this one.

I have, of course, thus far used the words "creative" and "creativity" as we once used them--to refer to how nearly the teacher was approaching the ideal form--the one true way--we had defined in our profession. Today the words "creative" and "creativity" are very much in vogue, but we must come to grips with what real creativity entails.

First of all, the creative classroom will not be replicated or duplicated. Each time the truly creative classroom is replicated, something is lost in the "translation" downward. That is essentially what happened to true audiolingualism--which wound up being dialog memorization and pattern drill recitation only. The creative classroom will not solve problems--it will "create" new problems, new ramifications.

Secondly, one does not "guide" creativity--one unleashes it. The new "creations" which result cannot be measured by existing tests or measures. In the creative classroom, as in the television ad, "there's a new you coming every day!" So, if creativity is our objective, and I hope it is, we must not try to confine the creative efforts within the boundaries of an existing syllabus or try to make it fit the measurements of already existing testing instruments. To attempt to force the new "creation" into the limits of the current syllabus or the existing test is not to encourage creativity at all; if the new "creation" fits the existing test or the current syllabus, all you have is a package for the creation of another time--probably meant for other students and other teachers.

Suppose for a moment that a young teacher in your school proposes to set up a creative classroom. In this context, she "furnishes" (rather than "equips") her classroom with a variety of cushions, comfortable chairs, and conversational groupings. She is experimenting with a form of demand learning and so some students are working their way straight through existing teaching programs, but some are doing unit one in a series of different texts, then going through the units two, and so on. This young woman is observed and everyone agrees that the students use the language freely and well; every observer is struck by the motivation of the students. Now, suppose too that this teacher does not grade conventionally; she keeps a diary for each student, recording the structural or phonetic or cultural phenomena he has mastered. Have you got the picture? WHICH OF YOU WOULD WILLINGLY ACCEPT THESE STUDENTS FOR SECOND-YEAR LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION?

When we use the word "creativity," we must be very sure that we are willing and able to accept creativity when and as it happens. We must be certain to recruit the dynamic and bold young people to be our teachers of the future who can fight for--and obtain--the things that are necessary for the best foreign-language education possible. We must be certain to develop teacher training designed to produce creative teachers, a process not predicated so heavily on the imitation of existing models. And we must be very certain to develop a profession of teachers receptive to the products of the creative teacher's classroom. When we examine our abilities to cope with creativity unleashed, we may find that we would prefer to encourage teachers to be innovative and to experiment without placing the onus of being creative upon ourselves.

But, if we are really determined to stimulate creative teaching, what are the things to which we can devote ourselves?

1. We can create opportunities for ourselves as learning models. Especially in the realm of deep culture teaching, of teaching for cross-cultural contrast, there is a need for the co-learner, the teacher who can learn with students. And this means telling the students that you are learning with them! And if you are to be a learning model, a co-learner, then of course the learning

cannot be predetermined in the syllabus or the test--it will have to be a cooperative definition evolved along with the students involved.

2. We can utilize everything at our disposal to create room for ever-increasing numbers of students within our foreign-language offerings. This means that we shall have to devote ourselves to "audience," coming to grips with the fact that offerings will have to change to fit the students--not vice-versa. We can emulate Carl Ziegler in his efforts to reach disadvantaged students through language in culture and Shirley Krogmeier in her efforts to use language as a means rather than an end. And in this process, we must learn to use everything--the philosophic thrust of the school, technology, community resources, student input--**EVERYTHING**.
3. We can turn our creative efforts toward articulation--not the articulation of high-school offerings with college offerings where ten percent of the students may need this service; we can turn our efforts toward articulating the language department offerings with the demands the schools at various levels are making of their teachers, for here the articulation expectation is one hundred percent. One hundred percent of our secondary-school teacher-trainees expect employment in the high schools and junior highs; one hundred percent of our junior-college trainees expect employment in junior colleges. One of the ironies of many of our college programs today is the fact that the "requirement" people take culture courses from which our teacher-trainees are barred, although everywhere they look in the professional literature they are being exhorted to teach culture.

If we are like Humpty Dumpty who used his meanings--any gimmick or variation on a technique can be called "creative teaching," but if we use our meanings, like Humpty Dumpty, then the creativity will be only in the eye of the beholder. One "creative" effort we can make is to distinguish between "teaching individuality" and "teaching creativity." When we use the word "creativity," let's be certain we are never describing just what the teacher does--let's judge creativity in the foreign-language classroom by what the teacher makes it possible for the student to do.